

Critical Habitat Designation for the Northern Spotted Owl

Questions and Answers

What action is the Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

The Service is revising the 1992 critical habitat designation for the northern spotted owl, a threatened species protected under the Endangered Species Act. In 1992, about 6.9 million acres of land were originally designated as critical habitat; this revision designates about 5.3 million acres in the same general areas. These lands are distributed across the geographic range occupied by the northern spotted owl, including the Olympic Peninsula, the Cascade Mountains of Washington, Oregon and northern California, the Coast Ranges in Oregon and California, and the Klamath Provinces in Oregon and California. Only federal land is designated as critical habitat for the northern spotted owl. The acreage designated, by state, rounded to the nearest 100,000 acres is:

	<u>2008 Revision</u>	<u>1992 Designation</u>
Washington	1.8 million	2.2 million
Oregon	2.3 million	3.3 million
California	1.2 million	1.4 million
TOTAL	5.3 million	6.9 million

Why does the Fish and Wildlife Service designate critical habitat?

Designation of critical habitat is required by the Endangered Species Act when a species is listed, unless it is found not prudent to do so. The Service originally designated critical habitat for the northern spotted owl on January 15, 1992, after listing the bird as a threatened species in 1990. In 2004, the Service completed a 5-year status review of the species, which found that it continues to require the protections of the Endangered Species Act.

What criteria are used to select land to be designated as critical habitat?

According to the Endangered Species Act, a critical habitat designation is for land within the range of a species at the time it is listed that has the physical or biological features essential for the conservation of the species and that may require special management. For the northern spotted owl, these features include particular forest types of sufficient area, quality and configuration to support the needs of territorial owl pairs throughout the year distributed across the species' range, including habitat for nesting, roosting, foraging and dispersal.

How were these specific areas selected as critical habitat for the northern spotted owl?

The Service followed the conservation strategy set forth in the 2007 draft and 2008 final recovery plans for the northern spotted owl, including that strategy's reliance on federal lands. Areas were selected in the recovery plans for their conservation benefit to the northern spotted owl within the geographical area occupied by the species. In federal forests west of the Cascade Mountains crest, the final recovery plan identifies specific conservation area boundaries, or habitat blocks, called Managed Owl Conservation Areas (MOCAs), and the final critical habitat designation in those forests overlays the MOCAs. The MOCAs provide a network of large blocks of contiguous habitat capable of supporting 20 pairs of owls and smaller blocks capable of supporting 1 to 19 pairs of owls. Blocks are spaced at appropriate dispersal distances (12

miles apart for large blocks and seven miles apart for small blocks) and include habitats that are representative of the historic geographic and ecological distributions of the northern spotted owl.

In response to extensive scientific review of the 2007 draft recovery plan, the final recovery plan adopts a broad-scale, “landscape management” approach to owl conservation areas in fire-prone forests east of the Cascades’ crest and does not identify specific owl conservation areas in these dry forest areas. As the regulations prescribing critical habitat require the delineation of specific geographic boundaries, the final critical habitat designation in these eastside forests is based on the owl conservation areas delineated in the 2007 draft recovery plan, as the Service considers these to represent the best available information regarding specific conservation areas for the northern spotted owl in this region.

What is the 2008 final recovery plan for the northern spotted owl?

Under the Endangered Species Act, the Service is required to outline the goals and objectives that must be met in order to recover an endangered species. The guiding document, called a recovery plan, is a road map on how to help species recover to the point that the protections of the Act are no longer necessary. The draft recovery plan for the northern spotted owl was released to the public in April 2007. Following extensive public comment, peer review and review by independent scientific panels, the draft recovery plan was significantly revised, resulting in the final recovery plan for the northern spotted owl, released in May 2008.

Who wrote the recovery plan?

The northern spotted owl recovery plan was prepared by the Service with the assistance of a recovery team representing federal agencies, state governments, the timber industry and the conservation community. The plan was one of the most thoroughly peer-reviewed recovery plans the Service has written.

Why is the Service designating critical habitat on the basis of a recovery plan?

The final recovery plan is based on the best scientific information, including all information that has become available since the northern spotted owl was listed as a threatened species in 1990. The plan reflects the most current assessment of the species’ conservation needs and provides the delineation of the block of habitat networks considered necessary to achieve the recovery of the northern spotted owl. The recommendations of the recovery plan have provided valuable guidance in the designation of critical habitat that will contribute to the conservation and recovery of the northern spotted owl.

In areas where the critical habitat units overlay Managed Owl Conservation Areas (MOCAs), what accounts for the difference in acreage between them?

The MOCAs, totaling 6.3 million acres, include congressionally reserved areas such as wilderness areas and national parks, which are managed in ways that benefit the conservation of the northern spotted owl and are not included in the critical habitat designation. When congressionally reserved lands are removed from the MOCAs, the end result is the 5.3 million acres being designated. In addition, the final recovery plan opted to apply a broad landscape approach to the conservation of the northern spotted owl in the fire-prone habitats east of the Cascades’ crest in Oregon, Washington and California. Because critical habitat requires the mapping of specific boundaries, we could not emulate this approach in these regions. Therefore, we retained the critical habitat units defined in the proposed rule for the eastside provinces, as

they were based on the Option 1 MOCAs from the draft recovery plan, which represent the most recent delineation of specific owl conservation areas in these areas.

What is the reason for the change from the original critical habitat designation?

The 1992 critical habitat designation was developed without the benefit of guidance from a final recovery plan and was conservative in its designation due to the many uncertainties associated with the conservation of the northern spotted owl. For example, the 1992 designation was 1 million acres larger than the reserve system recommended by the Interagency Scientific Committee to address uncertainties related to connectivity and to facilitate legal boundary descriptions. We have a better understanding now of habitat usage by the owl, as well as improved mapping and habitat assessment technologies. Of the 5.3 million acres in the revised critical habitat designation, 4.4 million acres are on lands designated in 1992. Some areas are different. Changes from the 1992 designation in the revised designation are due largely to:

- Recommendations of the 2007 draft and 2008 final recovery plan for the northern spotted owl, which reflects the most current assessment of the conservation needs of the species and delineates a more efficient configuration of habitat blocks emphasizing otherwise-reserved areas such as Late-Successional Reserves, identified in the Northwest Forest Plan, that were established after critical habitat was designated in 1992.
- Refinements in modeling and mapping technology since 1992 that allow for improved definition of owl conservation areas. An example of this refinement is that the 1992 rule had to move all critical habitat unit boundaries to the next section line beyond the actual habitat, due to mapping abilities at the time. Today's revised designation relies on Geographic Information System mapping, which does not require this kind of rounding-up.
- Improvements in biologists' understanding of northern spotted owl use of habitat. The northern spotted owl has been one of the most-studied owls in the world for more than 20 years and much information and data have been gathered since its 1990 listing. Additional information was gathered during the 5-year review of the bird's ESA listing status in 2004. All of this information was used in the development of the 2008 final draft recovery plan and this critical habitat designation. One example involves better understanding of limitations on the owl's use of high-elevation areas that may be in the 1992 designation but are not included in the revision. Yet another example is the elimination of the 60,506-acre critical habitat designation on Fort Lewis in Washington, where no northern spotted owls are known to occur.
- The removal of areas that have been designated wilderness since 1992. This includes the 17,500-acre Wild Sky Wilderness in Washington and two wilderness areas in California totaling 101,500 acres. Congressionally reserved areas such as wilderness areas and national parks are managed in ways that benefit the conservation of the northern spotted owl and are not included in the critical habitat designation.

Where are the 29 critical habitat units located? (Totals may not sum due to rounding; rounded to nearest 100 units)

Critical Habitat Unit by State		Acres	Hectares
Washington			
Unit 1	Olympic Peninsula	332,100 ac	134,400 ha
Unit 2	Northwest Washington Cascades	393,500 ac	159,200 ha

Unit 3	Okanogan	115,600 ac	46,800 ha
Unit 4	Entiat	304,800 ac	123,300 ha
Unit 5	Southwest Washington Cascades	523,700 ac	211,900 ha
Unit 6	Southeast Washington Cascades	143,400 ac	58,000 ha
Critical Habitat Unit by State		Acres	Hectares
Oregon			
Unit 7	Northern Oregon Coast Ranges	370,000 ac	149,700 ha
Unit 8	Southern Oregon Coast Ranges	212,700 ac	86,100 ha
Unit 9	Western Oregon Cascades North	335,600 ac	135,800 ha
Unit 10	Hood River	42,700 ac	17,300 ha
Unit 11	Eastern Oregon Cascades	106,600 ac	43,100 ha
Unit 12	Western Oregon Cascades South	448,100 ac	181,300 ha
Unit 13	Willamette/North Umpqua	118,500 ac	48,000 ha
Unit 14	Rogue–Umpqua	183,800 ac	74,400 ha
Oregon and California			
Unit 15	Oregon Klamath Mountains	195,200 ac	79,000 ha
Unit 16	Klamath Intra-Province	96,600 ac	39,100 ha
Unit 17	Southern Cascades	246,300 ac	99,700 ha
Unit 25	Scott and Salmon Mountains	242,200 ac	98,000 ha
California			
Unit 18	Coastal Redwoods	6,900 ac	2,800 ha
Unit 19	Coastal Humboldt	30,700 ac	12,400 ha
Unit 20	King Range	14,800 ac	6,000 ha
Unit 21	South Fork Mountain Divide	137,900 ac	55,800 ha
Unit 22	Eel – Russian River	20,300 ac	8,200 ha
Unit 23	Mendocino Coast Ranges	186,200 ac	75,400 ha
Unit 24	Western Klamath/Siskiyou Mountains	219,300 ac	88,700 ha
Unit 26	Trinity Divide	13,900 ac	5,600 ha
Unit 27	Shasta–Trinity Lakes	86,800 ac	35,100 ha
Unit 28	Eastern Klamath Mountains	110,800 ac	44,800 ha
Unit 29	Shasta/McCloud	73,300 ac	29,700 ha

What is the land ownership of these units? (Totals may not sum due to rounding; rounded to nearest 100 units)

Critical Habitat Units	U.S. Forest Service		BLM	
	Acres	Hectares	Acres	Hectares
Washington				
Olympic Peninsula	332,100 ac	134,400 ha	0	
Northwest Washington Cascades	393,500 ac	159,200 ha	0	
Okanogan	115,600 ac	46,800 ha	0	
Entiat	304,800 ac	123,300 ha	0	
Southwest Washington Cascades	523,700 ac	211,900 ha	0	
Southeast Washington Cascades	143,400 ac	58,000 ha	0	
Oregon				
Northern Oregon Coast Ranges	206,700 ac	83,600 ha	163,300 ac	66,100 ha
Southern Oregon Coast Ranges	67,800 ac	27,400 ha	144,900 ac	58,600 ha
Western Oregon Cascades North	334,700 ac	135,400 ha	900 ac	400 ha
Hood River	42,700 ac	17,300 ha	0	
Eastern Oregon Cascades	106,600 ac	43,100 ha	0	
Western Oregon Cascades South	448,000 ac	181,300 ha	100 ac	40 ha
Willamette/North Umpqua	0		118,500 ac	48,000 ha
Rogue-Umpqua	23,400 ac	9,500 ha	160,500 ac	65,000 ha
Oregon and California				
Oregon Klamath Mountains	194,600 ac	78,800 ha	600 ac	200 ha
Klamath Intra-Province	58,000 ac	23,500 ha	38,600 ac	15,600 ha
Southern Cascades	191,600 ac	77,500 ha	54,700 ac	22,100 ha
Scott and Salmon Mountains	242,200 ac	98,100 ha	0	
California				
Coastal Redwoods	6,900 ac	2,800 ha	0	
Coastal Humboldt	0		30,700 ac	12,400 ha
King Range	0		14,800 ac	6,000 ha
South Fork Mountain Divide	133,800 ac	54,100 ha	4,100 ac	1,700 ha
Eel – Russian River	0		20,300 ac	8,200 ha
Mendocino Coast Ranges	186,200 ac	75,400 ha	0	
Western Klamath/Siskiyou Mountains	215,600 ac	87,200 ha	3,700 ac	1,500 ha
Trinity Divide	13,900 ac	5,600 ha	0	
Shasta-Trinity Lakes	85,700 ac	34,700 ha	1,100 ac	400 ha
Eastern Klamath Mountains	110,800 ac	44,800 ha	0	
Shasta/McCloud	73,300 ac	29,700 ha	0	

Why are you designating only federal lands?

The majority of remaining suitable habitat for the northern spotted owl, over 90 percent in Oregon and Washington, is confined to federal lands. The foundation of the current recovery strategy, as set forth in the 2007 draft and 2008 final recovery plans for the northern spotted owl,

is a network of owl conservation areas located on federal lands where recovery actions will be focused, including the possible control of barred owls in certain study areas. As wilderness areas and national parks are not included in the critical habitat designation, the remaining federal lands are managed entirely by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The Service relied on the recovery plan's recommendations and work with the primary land managers, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, to identify those areas most likely to contribute to the recovery of the species for the purposes of designating critical habitat.

Why is the Service revising its earlier critical habitat designation for this species at this time?

This revision of critical habitat was initiated in response to a court-approved settlement agreement with the Western Council of Industrial Workers, American Forest Resource Council, the Swanson Group and Rough and Ready Lumber Company. The revision incorporates the latest information regarding the northern spotted owl and its habitat; land-use allocations such as Late-Successional Reserves added since the 1992 critical habitat designation; and refinements in modeling and mapping technology. These factors allow for the more-precise definition of owl conservation areas presented in the 2007 draft and 2008 final recovery plans, used as the basis for this designation.

What is the effect of a critical habitat designation?

Critical habitat is designated on areas that contain the physical and biological features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management considerations. Under the Endangered Species Act, all federal agencies must ensure any action they authorize, fund or carry out does not destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve or other conservation area.

Will northern spotted owl habitat be adequately protected by this designation?

Areas designated as critical habitat receive protection by requiring federal agencies to avoid the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat from actions authorized, funded or carried out by a federal agency or occurring on federal land. In areas where northern spotted owls occur, federal agencies already are consulting with the Service on potential effects of proposed actions, regardless of whether these lands are designated as critical habitat. This will not change.

This critical habitat designation benefits from the 2007-2008 recovery planning effort, which used all scientific information on the northern spotted owl available before and since the 1992 critical habitat designation to identify areas with the best long-term attributes for owl conservation. These are the areas included in this critical habitat revision and are the best assessment of the habitat needed to conserve and recover the owl.

How does this designation relate to BLM and Forest Service land and resource management planning?

BLM is currently conducting its Western Oregon Plan Revisions, which will revise six western Oregon Resource Management Plans. The revisions are due for completion in 2008 and will include provisions for management of listed species. Current direction for habitat management for the northern spotted owl on the National Forests is found in 18 Land and Resource Management Plans, which are scheduled for revision over the next decade. The final recovery plan, which is the basis for this critical habitat designation, provides recovery criteria, objectives

and actions specific to the northern spotted owl. It offers guidance for all federal efforts to recover the northern spotted owl. Because the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management manage most of the lands managed as northern spotted owl habitat, the Service worked closely with these agencies on the development of the recovery plan and the critical habitat designation and we will continue to work closely with them as they make any revisions to their management plans.

Where can I get a copy of the revised designation?

You can download a copy of the Critical Habitat Designation for the Northern Spotted Owl from the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/nsopch.html>. A copy also may be obtained by contacting the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, 2600 SE 98th Ave., Suite 100, Portland, OR 97266. The office's phone number is 503-231-6179.